

and the immediate post-war years are particularly noteworthy. Menzani's account uncovers interesting overlaps between national political factors and industrial decision-making, which are of interest to scholars of Fascism.

Chapter 4 presents multiple case studies that illustrate the vast possibilities of future research in other specific subsectors in the production of industrial machines. Menzani provides three main examples: firstly, an historical account of the development of the packaging machines industry around Bologna; secondly, an assessment of the growth and complex challenges faced by companies providing machines for plastics engineering; lastly, a survey of companies manufacturing machinery for the chemical industry. The chapter also includes a final section dedicated to a brief study of other key subsectors, which covers the evolution of machines that serve the paper, leather and lumber industries. The treatment of these multiple and dissimilar industries lacks a consistent methodology. Their difference in scale, history, and geographical distribution forced Menzani to approach each one from a different perspective, and the subsectors discussed do not lend themselves to a comparative analysis. Still, the chapter aptly illustrates the multiple avenues of inquiry business historians may pursue in future studies of industrial machines production.

Menzani's analysis stops short of the Eurozone crisis of 2009, which has taken a heavy toll on the Italian economy, particularly in the manufacturing sector. The author himself admits that his research does not include ISTAT data from 2011, as they were not available at the time of publication. These data may reveal a decline or reinvention of the sector; the landscape of industrial machines production described by *La macchina nel tempo* has likely evolved in significant ways during the last five years, and may soon require another assessment. Another limitation of this volume is the absence of technical drawings and photographic reproductions, which in some cases could help readers to understand the importance of small-scale technological improvements that words may fail to convey. Nonetheless, Menzani's volume has the merit of providing the first panoramic overview of this important sector of the Italian economy in the post-war years. He presents a large amount of quantitative data in a clear Italian syntax. The tripartite focus on historical data, geographic distribution and industrial subsectors makes this book a useful point of departure for historians and social scientists working on Italian business history and political science.

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De Gasperi e lo 'stato forte': legislazione antitotalitaria e difesa della democrazia negli anni del centrismo (1950–1952), by Federico Mazzei, Milan, Le Monnier, 2013, xix + 451 pp., €29.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-88-00-74431-7

It is difficult to engage in a historical analysis of post-war Italy without falling into the trap of the traditional polarisation of political viewpoints. The history of the first years of the Italian Republic has often lacked an objective analysis, instead being viewed through the lens of ideology, without a historical perspective. Federico Mazzei's new work is an interesting attempt

to go beyond the traditional contrast of the Italian intellectual and political sphere, and to conduct a rational and detached inquiry of the last phase of De Gasperi's leadership.

The early 1950s was a particularly divisive period in contemporary Italian history. On the one hand, these years were characterised by an intensification of the political struggle between the Christian Democrats (DC) and the Italian Communist Party (PCI), against the international backdrop of the Korean War and the fear that escalating tensions would provoke a Third World War. On the other hand, on a national level they were characterised by the need for the newly established Italian Republic to carry out fundamental reforms that would shape the country for decades to come. In such a delicate situation, De Gasperi tried to build a 'centrist' common front of moderate forces against both communism and the neo-Fascist right wing.

As Mazzei stresses in the introduction to his book, De Gasperi's centrism has traditionally been interpreted by Marxist historiography as an attempt to neutralise opposition forces through authoritarian politics, a mild 'coup d'état' against left-wing parties. Historians from the Catholic camp do not refute this interpretation entirely. While they reject the idea of authoritarianism, stressing De Gasperi's respect for Parliament and his rejection of a simplistic Cold War bipolarity, they do accept the interpretation of the last phase of his government as a period of political regression due to the negative influence of the international crisis and the tightening of the domestic political debate.

Against these 'classical' views, Mazzei suggests a different interpretation that takes into account the specificity of the period and the many pressures to which De Gasperi's government and the young Italian democracy were exposed. Apart from anti-communist activity, Mazzei calls attention to the tensions created by the growth of neo-Fascism, the influence of the Vatican, and the behaviour of various factions within the DC, which were often inclined to sacrifice certain democratic guarantees in order to fight the communist menace.

Mazzei reconstructs the political debate of the period by focusing on a series of key legislative measures: the agrarian reform of 1950, where the DC sought to embrace certain social demands while keeping the support of the landowners; Mario Scelba's 'civil defence' project, which would have created a special paramilitary structure under the direct control of the ministry of interior; the regulation of trade union activities in application of articles 39 and 40 of the Constitution; the idea of a 'polyvalent law' against all non-democratic parties, which eventually became the 1952 Scelba Law; the debate on the law for the enforcement of article 21 of the Constitution on press freedoms; and finally the new electoral law to replace the purely proportional representation system in favour of a majoritarian system. The latter measure was designed to increase the powers of the executive, but instead it represented De Gasperi's biggest failure: not only did the unpopular 'swindle law' cost the DC votes in the 1953 election as voters switched to radical parties, but it was also quickly repealed.

Mazzei analyses these developments through an examination of the parliamentary activity and internal debates of the DC. He shows De Gasperi's ability to move deftly between different political pressures: from the US requests to outlaw the PCI to the Vatican's push for a stricter law on press freedom (to curb communist propaganda); from the attempts to ban the neo-Fascist *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI) to the subsequent debate on whether a party should be dissolved even in the absence of clear subversive activities. Mazzei clearly demonstrates that the thorniest problem facing De Gasperi and the post-war political class was how to defend fundamental democratic principles against anti-democratic forces without abandoning democracy itself. This task was made all the more difficult by the international situation, which tended to polarise political debate rather than encourage political cooperation. In Mazzei's opinion, De Gasperi never abandoned the primacy of democracy and his respect for

parliament. Rather than an authoritative drift, Mazzei argues that De Gasperi carried out a series of interventions aimed at the preservation of democracy through the strengthening of state power.

Although limited to a discussion of developments within the DC (one unanswered question, for example, is how real was the perceived threat of a communist-led insurrection), the work is a significant contribution to the reconstruction of the first, fundamental decade of the Italian Republic. Furthermore, the research highlights the many failures of that season of missed reforms – failures that still affect the country today, more than 60 years later. Contrary to the banal simplifications of traditional interpretations of the era, *De Gasperi e lo 'Stato Forte'* represents an important contribution to the historiography of the period and a potential starting point for further research on the tense but fascinating years of the establishment of the Italian Republic.

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Dal Fascismo alla DC. Tassinari, Medici e la bonifica nell'Italia tra gli anni Trenta e Cinquanta, by Marco Zaganella, Siena, Edizioni Cantagalli, 2010, 272 pp., €12.75, ISBN 973-8882725938

Marco Zaganella's book takes on the task of shedding new light on the continuities between Fascist and Republican Italy, using Italian agrarian politics from the 1920s to the 1950s, (in particular the notion of *bonifica*) as a case study and entry point. It focuses on Giuseppe Tassinari and Giuseppe Medici, two key technocrats who worked as ministers of agriculture in 1939–1941 and 1954–1955 respectively, demonstrating how they helped to pave the way for a more effective distribution of land and dismantle the *latifondo*.

The book's central argument is that late-1930s Italy was an important laboratory for the development of modernising policies aimed at resolving the problem of land and promoting a shift from a liberal-capitalist to a state-controlled economy based on demographics. Zaganella identifies Tassinari as the most important exponent of this shift, opposing his policies to those proposed by Arrigo Serpieri, a liberal collaborator of the Ministry of Agriculture from 1929 to 1935, and known as the first advocate of the *bonifica integrale* (integral land reclamation). Zaganella's analysis of the differences between the liberal Serpieri and the social-autarchic Tassinari, and the influence of the latter on the 1950 agrarian reforms, constitutes the discursive backbone of the book and represents Zaganella's major contribution to the fields of Fascist historiography and to debates on Fascism's post-war legacy.

The book is divided into three chapters. The first chapter, entitled 'Due concezioni della bonifica', discusses the differences between Serpieri's and Tassinari's ideas of *bonifica*. Here the author underlines the discontinuities between Serpieri's liberal notion of *bonifica integrale* – approved with the 1924 agrarian reform in an effort to safeguard the rural world against the encroachments of modernity – and Tassinari's less ideological and more 'scientific' notion of *bonifica*, based on social and demographic factors. The analysis is supported by the claim that Tassinari's conceptualisation of *bonifica* represented a more decisive attempt to challenge the structure of the *latifondo*.